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SHADES OF MARRIOTT BOMBING IN FAILED TERROR PLOT

Security analyst sees possibility of 'operational synergy' among groups such as the TTP, BLA and BLF as outfits shift focus back to civilian targets

By Munawer Azeem in Islamabad

SITUATIONER

THE people of Karachi definitely breathed a huge sigh of relief after intelligence and law enforcement agencies revealed they had thwarted a terrorist plot to target the bustling metropolis.

The images and information coming out about the failed attempt are enough to send shivers down the spine – 2,000kg of explosive material, packed into blue plastic drums and faux gas cylinders was found hidden under a pile of clothes on a ready-to-blow vehicle based improvised explosive device (VBIED).

The vehicle in question was a truck — known locally as a 'Mazda'. Although VBIEDs are not often used by local terror outfits — given the logistical difficulty involved in preparing and transporting them — some of the deadliest attacks in the country's history were perpetrated using them as a delivery mechanism.

The most obvious parallel can be drawn with the 2008 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, one of the deadliest attacks ever perpetrated in the capital.

I covered the aftermath of that bombing, which left a crater 34 feet deep and 59 feet wide at the main entrance to the hotel building.

At the time, I had interviewed a witness who told me that he was standing near the gate when a man started firing and at the same time a dumper appeared at the main gate. "I ran away from the scene to save my life but later heard an explosion." The dumper caught fire and the security guards started extinguishing the fire. That was when the vehicle exploded.

The explosion had been heard clear across the city; there were casualties in Balochistan House — located across the road — and nearby PTV Headquarters as well.

Follow-up investigations revealed that around 1,000kg of explosive material had been used — a mix of ammonium powder, RDX and TNT, as well as mortar shells and artillery rounds.

Given the scale of that bombing, one can safely assume that if the attack on Karachi had occurred, the potential death and destruction it would have wreaked would have been off the charts.

The fact that the plot was foiled following a tip-off from intelligence agencies — a fact alluded to during the official CTD presser on Monday — is also a heartening development, indicating that security agencies are actively working to keep Karachi safe from terrorists.

In recent years, urban centres such as Karachi and Lahore had been largely spared any major attack on civilian targets, as was the norm in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Over the past couple of years, terror outfits across the country had seemingly shifted their focus to security forces, targeting their positions rather than softer, civilian targets.

However, the discovery of the Karachi terror plot seems to indicate a return to form for these nefarious groups.

Talking to *Dawn*, security analyst Imtiaz Gul said that it was quite likely that militants would again start targeting civilians.

"If we believe the official version, that it was the BLA that planned this subversion, it makes things pretty obvious that they have chosen to inflict damage in non-Baloch areas so as to not to annoy their own population."

This, he recalled, is what happened to the TTP, Ahrarul Hind and similar smaller groups after they targeted both civilians and the security apparatus — it generated widespread resentment and rejection among the masses and they were forced to change their tactics.

Given the scale and ambition of the terror plot, one of the theories doing the rounds alludes to a possible collaboration between multiple terror outfits, since it would be quite a challenge for any one group to assemble a VBIED of this scale and smuggle it into a well-guarded city like Karachi.

When asked about the possibility, Mr Gul said there was "very obvious operational synergy among groups such as the TTP, BLA and BLF who are believed to be the critical links in the externally-driven proxy terrorism that Pakistan is facing".

This also means these groups and their handlers are imparting training and techniques for subversive activities, he noted.

A VIEW of the Hoper Valley, a popular tourist destination in the Nagar Khas area of Gilgit-Baltistan, after recent snowfall.—Jamil Nagri

KP CM urges lawyers to rise up for rule of law

Praises Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir for 'creating a new history of resistance'

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Monday called upon lawyers to stand up for an independent judiciary and the supremacy of the Constitution, as he continued efforts to rally support for the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's street movement.

While addressing the legal fraternity at a ceremony organised by the Insaf Lawyers' Forum, his party's legal wing, the chief minister emphasised the need for a lawyers' movement and assured participants that the youth would stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

"If we do not stand up today for the supremacy of the Constitution, the law, and an independent judiciary, future generations will not forgive us," CM Afridi said.

"Long live resistance," he remarked at the event, marked by slogans and strong speeches against what the speakers described as "growing authoritarianism, erosion of constitutional guarantees and curbs on civil liberties".

Referring to the political environment of the last three years, the chief minister said an atmosphere of oppression and fascism had prevailed in the country.

He strongly criticised the 26th and 27th Amendments, urging lawyers to raise their voices against them. "Anyone whose conscience is even one per cent alive will oppose these amendments and unfair trials of journalists and politicians, and demand the release of all political workers who are wrongfully imprisoned," he said.

Mr Afridi also reiterated his support for PTI founder Imran Khan, urging lawyers to stand by him against what he termed oppression and barbarity. He stressed that Imran Khan was not demanding his release but a fair trial. "A convicted person was received at the airport," he said, in an apparent reference to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan in October 2023.

Despite orders by three Islamabad High Court judges, the CM lamented, he was repeatedly denied a meeting with Imran Khan at Adiala jail. "The jail superintendent threw the court's orders in the trash," he alleged, adding that Mr Khan was "fighting our war in jail".

KP govt opposed to military operations, says Afridi: Page 8

Highlighting press freedom issues, he said journalist Arshad Sharif had to go in self-exile to save his life due to lack of justice and security. However, he was not spared even abroad, he said while referring to his assassination in Kenya in October 2022. He also mentioned that some journalists had recently been sentenced following trials in absentia.

During his address, CM Afridi said the resistance shown by the youth and women in the current situation was encouraging. He particularly praised Advocate Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir, who was present in the audience, saying she had "created a new history of resistance" and served as a source of inspiration for the youth.

He said people from all schools of thought in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa believed a military operation was not the solution to rising militancy in the province, but expressed concern that preparations for such an operation were still underway. "This is not a functioning system but hooliganism," he remarked.

On the occasion, CM Afridi announced Karachi as his next destination after wrapping up his three-day visit to Lahore.

Lawyers and civil society representatives at the event also voiced serious concern over the prevailing political and constitutional situation, as participants reaffirmed their resolve to continue the struggle for the rule of law, truth and justice.

The lawyers declared that the legal fraternity would not bow to pressure or coercion. Other speakers also strongly criticised constitutional deviations and enforced disappearances.

Addressing the ceremony, former president of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association Riasat Ali Azad said lawyers had supported truth in every era and had always stood by the law.

He said those who remained silent when people were being picked up from their homes should be ashamed, adding that those who compromised on principles were unfit to lead the bar.

Mr Khan's spokesperson Niazullah Khan Niazi said lawyers were being suppressed and the Constitution had been practically rendered ineffective. He appreciated the media role and said the PTI founder lived in the hearts of the people. "If talking about the Constitution and law is a crime, then this crime will be committed repeatedly," he said, announcing his support for the KP CM.

Member of the Islamabad Bar Council Raja Aleem Abbasi recalled that the movement for the independence of the judiciary had been launched by the Islamabad Bar, adding that lawyers had resisted every dictatorial move, including Gen Zia's martial law.

He said amendments like the 26th Amendment had severely affected the judiciary and stressed that unity among lawyers was essential for an effective movement. Council member Zafar Khokhar and chairman Asif Irfan also spoke.

SC accepts for hearing CCP's review plea in sugar mills case

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday accepted for hearing a petition by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) on a matter regarding the imposition of penalties on sugar mills over price manipulation and collusive practices.

The dispute emerged in November 2020 when the CCP – an independent regulatory body established in 2007 under the Competition Act with an objective to ensure a level-playing field in markets by preventing anti-competitive practices such as cartels, deceptive marketing and mergers that may harm competition — issued identical show-cause notices to the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) and different sugar mills across the country, accusing them of violating Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2010, which bans cartelisation.

A four-member CCP panel after hearing the case had a split decision in August 2021 whereby two members, including then chairperson Rahat Kaunain Hassan, found the mills guilty and the remaining two members sought a fresh inquiry. However, the chairperson cast a deciding vote that resulted in the imposition of Rs44 billion fines on almost 72 sugar mills for alleged manipulative practices.

The sugar mills challenged that decision before the appellate tribunal, which in May 2025 ordered a new hearing by a member who had not signed either opinion. In September, the SC struck down tribunal's order and CCP's casting-vote decision, and while annulling the fines referred the matter back to the 'tribunal' for fresh proceedings based on the original 2020 notices.

Instituted by senior counsel Asma Hamid, the review petition sought a clarification on the SC's decision to remand the matter to the tribunal instead of the CCP for fresh hearing.

The review petition pleaded that the power to make an order on the basis of inquiries/show cause notices vests with the commission in exercise of its powers under Section 30 of the Competition Commission Act, 2010. It is in exercise of powers vested in the commission that the inquiries were conducted and show cause notices were issued, orders made and penalties recovered for the contraventions of the act committed by the parties (sugar mills), it argued.

Deal signed to strengthen cybersecurity

ISLAMABAD: The National Computer Emergency Response Team of Pakistan (PKCERT) and global cybersecurity company Kaspersky have signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance the country's national cybersecurity posture through improved threat detection and mitigation.

The agreement marks a major step toward strengthening Pakistan's cyber resilience via coordinated efforts, including extensive training to enhance operational readiness across government, industry and academia. The collaboration aims to cultivate a skilled workforce aligned with international standards while ensuring the timely dissemination of actionable threat intelligence.

"Information and communication technologies play a vital role in socio-economic development of a country; however, they have also introduced new challenges such as cyber espionage, hacktivism, ransomware, data breaches ... and disinformation campaigns," National CERT's Director General Dr Haider Abbas said.

Under the agreement, the organisations will cooperate on legislative issues, incident response, research and professional exchanges. They intend to share technical information and data feeds regarding cyberthreats affecting citizens, businesses and government institutions.—Dawn Report

One killed as IED targets factory workers in Lakki Marwat

11 cement plant employees injured; police gun down attacker in subsequent operation

By Ghulam Mursalin Marwat

LAKKI MARWAT: At least one factory worker lost his life and 11 were injured after a bus – transporting them to a cement plant — was targeted with an improvised explosive device, prompting a police operation that left one alleged attacker dead.

A police official said the factory vehicle was targeted by banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists near the Nawerkhel Morr on Begukhel Road.

He said that one person, identified as Fareedullah, lost his life, while 11 — including two women — were injured. They were later shifted to a local government hospital, whose Medical Superintendent Dr Kifayat Bittani told *Dawn* that two of the injured were in critical condition.

In response to the bombing, the police launched a large-scale operation in the area. Lakki police, CTD Bannu Region, security forces, and peace committees jointly conducted the operation against terrorists' hideouts in the areas of Wanda Sheikh Khula and Zarifwal, the police official added.

According to the official, the militants took up positions in their mountainous hideouts during the operation, which resulted in a fierce exchange of fire between the police and the militants.

"As a result, one terrorist was killed and his body was taken into custody by the police," he claimed, adding that a police constable was also injured in the gun battle and was shifted to the hospital.

Earlier, in a statement, District Police Officer Nazir Khan declared the bomb attack on the vehicle a "cowardly act" by terrorists and said that it was aimed at "disrupting the peace of the area".

"The injured have been immediately shifted to the hospital, and the elements involved in the explosion will be arrested soon," he said.

He added that the police were on high alert to maintain peace in the area and "all possible steps" were being taken to protect the lives and property of the people.

The DPO, as well as Bannu Regional Police Officer Sajjad Khan, also visited the injured at the hospital. They inquired about their well-being and reviewed the medical assistance being provided to them.

Cross-examination of key witness concludes in Imaan's tweet case

Witness declines to comment on statements by incumbent ministers and ex-army official

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The cross-examination of an official of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) and a key prosecution witness in the controversial social media posts case against lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her spouse Hadi Ali Chattha, concluded on Monday.

During cross-witness, the star witness refused to comment on previous statements made by incumbent ministers and a former army official. The statements pertained to the issue of missing persons, Balochistan's rights, and criticism of the military.

These statements were referred to by Mr Chattha, who, along with Ms Mazari-Hazir, conducted the cross-examination from the defence side.

Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha are facing legal proceedings on accusations of attempting to incite divisions on linguistic grounds through social media posts and of creating the impression that the armed forces were engaged in terrorism within the country.

The first information report (FIR), registered by the NCCIA under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), alleged that the two held security forces responsible for cases of missing persons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. It further stated that they portrayed the armed forces as ineffective against proscribed groups, including the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka presided over the hearing.

During the hearing, Mr Chattha referred to a newspaper report from July 31, 2025, which carried statements by Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) Balochistan Emir Maulana Hidayatur Rehman, who also led the Haq Do Balochistan Tehreek.

He had staged a protest march from Quetta to Islamabad, demanding an end to humiliation in the name of security and the release of rights activist Dr Mahrang Baloch and other detainees, among other demands.

According to the media report, the movement had agreed to establish a protest camp outside the Lahore Press Club while a high-level federal government committee initiated talks with the JI leader.

The announcement was made by Ms Aurangzeb, who had assured JI leaders that the Punjab government fully supported the legitimate demands of the people of Balochistan.

The report further quoted Maulana Hidayatur Rehman as expressing hope that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, who had raised her voice on the issue of Balochistan's missing persons while in opposition, would continue the same stance as the provincial chief executive.

When Mr Chattha asked the prosecution witness to comment on the matter, NCCIA official Anisur Rehman refused, stating that he would only offer an opinion if such a case formally came before him.

Mr Chattha also cited statements attributed to Minister of State for Law Barrister Aqeel Malik in a report by a foreign news outlet regarding negotiations with Dr Mahrang Baloch, who has been vocal about enforced disappearances.

Mr Rehman again declined to comment.

Several videos were also played in court, including one of a speech by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam, in which slogans derogatory towards the armed forces and its chief could be heard.

When asked whether such an event amounted to opposing the state, Mr Rehman said he would comment only after reviewing the video in his official capacity. He also admitted that he was unaware whether enforced disappearances constituted a serious issue in Pakistan, whether a commission on missing persons existed, or what the state policy on the matter was.

Following the completion of cross-examination by Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha, the court adjourned the hearing until January 7.